

Message Text

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PAGE 01 JAKART 01120 250954Z
ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-02 ISO-00 ONY-00 /013 W
-----000218 251837Z /46 R
R 250901Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6382

C O N F I D E N T I A L JAKARTA 1120

FOR EA/TIMBS DIRECTOR FRITTS FROM AMBASSADOR
E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EAID (PEACE CORPS), ID
SUBJECT: PEACE CORPS IN INDONESIA

REF: STATE 4639

1. AS YOU ARE AWARE, I HAVE VERY POSITIVE MEMORIES OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE SMALL BUT DEDICATED GROUP OF PEACE CORPSMEN I KNEW IN INDONESIA 13 YEARS AGO AND WOULD LIKE TO SEE A SIMILAR GROUP RETURN TO THIS COUNTRY. WE BELIEVE WE COULD USE SOME CAREFULLY SELECTED VOLUNTEERS TO WORK WITH AID-SUPPORTED PROJECTS. THE INDONESIAN VOLUNTEER CORPS BUTSI EARLIER EXPRESSED SOME INTEREST IN OBTAINING PEACE CORPS TRAINING ASSISTANCE AND MIGHT FIND A ROLE FOR VOLUNTEERS ELSEWHERE AS WELL.

2. THE PROBLEM IS, OF CURSE, OBTAINING GOI CONCURRENCE FOR THE PRESENCE OF AN ORGANIZATION WHICH IS REMEMBERED BY MOST INDONESIANS PRIMARILY BECAUSE OF THE STRONG POLITICAL CONTROVERSY IT EVOKED. THE FACT THAT CRITICISM OF THE PEACE CORPS HERE IS HIGHLY UNSPECIFIC HAS NOT DETRACTED FROM THE EMOTION AND HAS MADE EFFECTIVE REBUTTAL DIFFICULT.

3. WE HAVE VERY GINGERLY TESTED THE WATER RECENTLY AND FOUND WE COULD NOT GET OUR TOES IN FOR THE ICE. IT IS CLEAR THAT NO INDONESIAN WANTS TO ADD AN ISSUE OF ANY POLITICAL SENSITIVITY TO THE CURRENT HIGHLY CHARGED AT-
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MOSPHERE. SINCE ATTITUDES TOWARD PEACE CORPS CAN ONLY WARM UP IN THE POST-MPR PERIOD, AND SINCE WE MIGHT IN ANY EVENT HAVE TO START OVER WITH ANOTHER GROUP OF POLICYMAKERS AFTER THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, I BELIEVE IT IMPORTANT THAT WE POSTPONE FURTHER SOUNDINGS UNTIL AFTER THE NEW CABINET IS FORMED. AT THAT TIME, I WILL MYSELF EXPLORE POSSIBILITIES WITH APPROPRIATE MINISTERS.

4. IN THE MEANTIME, IT WOULD BE HELPFUL IF WE COULD FORMULATE SPECIFIC PROPOSALS WHICH COULD HELP PERSUADE THE INDONESIANS THAT THE PEACE CORPS WOULD CAUSE THEM FEW POLITICAL DIFFICULTIES. I WOULD SUGGEST, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT INITIALLY AT LEAST THE GROUP BE NO LARGER THAN OTHER VOLUNTEER SERVICES HERE (THE LARGEST IS CURRENTLY THE BRITISH VOLUNTEER SERVICE OVERSEAS WITH A PROJECTED STRENGTH OF 27) AND THAT THEY BE ATTACHED TO USAID OR BUTSI RELATED PROGRAMS. PERHAPS OUR BEST CHANCE OF OBTAINING AN AFFIRMATIVE ANSWER WOULD BE TO PLACE THE PROGRAM IN AN EXCHANGE CONTEXT UNDER WHICH A COMPARABLE NUMBER OF INDONESIAN BUTSI MEMBERS WERE OFFERED A YEAR'S WORK WITH A U.S. DOMESTIC VOLUNTEER PROGRAM (SUCH AS UNDER THE UN VOLUNTEER PROGRAM). NEEDLESS TO SAY, BUTSI MEMBERS CAN CONTRIBUTE LITTLE TO OUR DOMESTIC PROGRAMS BUT THE PROGRAMS MIGHT CONTRIBUTE A GREAT DEAL TO THEM. MORE IMPORTANT, THE EXCHANGE FEATURE WOULD ASSUAGE THE INDONESIAN EGO AND PERHAPS OVERCOME POLITICAL SENSITIVITIES. I REALIZE THAT THIS PROPOSAL MIGHT BE VERY HARD FOR OUR BUREAUCRACY TO DIGEST IN ANY FORM, BUT, IF NEED BE, WE COULD STIPULATE THAT EACH COUNTRY WOULD PAY FOR THE UPKEEP OF ITS OWN VOLUNTEERS. THE POLITICAL PAY-OFF WOULD BE MORE IN OUR MAKING THE OFFER THAN IN THE INDONESIANS' ACCEPTING IT.

5. I HOPE THE COMMENTS ABOVE WILL STIMULATE A DIALOGUE
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WHICH WILL ALLOW US TO ARRIVE AT A SUITABLE CONCEPT BEFORE
THE PROJECTED APRIL FORMATION OF A NEW CABINET.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: VOLUNTARY AGENCIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 25 jan 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978JAKART01120
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780037-0759
Format: TEL
From: JAKARTA
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780125/aaaaauxc.tel
Line Count: 97
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 52d0a1e0-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Reference: 78 STATE 4639
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3718230
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PEACE CORPS IN INDONESIA
TAGS: EAID, ID, PC
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/52d0a1e0-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014